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Did Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, write the Langham Letter? [Part 2 of 3]

Whoever wrote the Langham *Letter* must have known the historical personages mentioned by name in the text. In addition to Langham himself, these historical personages include Humfrey Martin, "my master Bomsted", "Master Alderman Pullison, my good oold freend Master smith Customer, Master thorogood, Master Denman", Sir George Howard, and William Patten. The identities of these individuals, and the facts which link them to the Earl of Oxford, will be explored in the paragraphs which follow.

1. Robert Langham, the purported author of the Langham Letter.

As one of Queen Elizabeth's courtiers, the Earl of Oxford would certainly have known Robert Langham.

R.J.P. Kuin, in a recent study, has drawn attention to warrants in the Acts of the Privy Council which show that Robert Langham served, between 1573 and 1580, as Keeper of the Privy Council Chamber at an annual stipend of £10. A typical warrant, from 1577, particularizes Langham's title, and the duties for which he was responsible:

A warraunt to the Tresourer of the Chamber to deliver to Robert Langham, Keper of the Councell Chamber, for provision of bowghes and flowers for the said Chamber, and for his diligence and paines there taken for one whole yere endid at thanunciacion of Our Ladie last past, the sum of x.l (Kuin 15).

What is immediately apparent is that there is a striking discrepancy between Langham's actual title and duties, as recorded in the Acts of the Privy Council, and the description given of them in the Langham *Letter*. In the *Letter*, Langham is described, not as the "Keper of the Councell Chamber", but as:

Clark of the Councell chamber doore, and allso kepar of the same (Kuin 80).

Similarly, the author of the *Letter* has nothing to say about such duties as the provision of boughs and flowers. Instead, Langham is depicted as an officious busybody:

Noow syr, if the Councell sit, I am at hand, wait at an inch I warrant yoo. If any make babling, peas (say I) woot ye whear ye ar? If I take a lystenar, or a priar in at the chinks, or at the lokhole, I am by and by in the bonez of him: but now they keep good order, they kno me well inough: If a be a freend, or such one az I like: I make him sit down by me on a foorm, or a cheast, Let the rest walk a Gods name (Kuin 77-8).

The discrepancy between Langham's official title and duties, and his title and duties as given in the *Letter*, leads to one of two possible conclusions. As Scott says:

We are thus faced with two alternatives. Either the real author was a great coxcomb named Robert Langham, Keeper of the Council Chamber, or else he was an unknown practical joker who thought the Keeper a great coxcomb and jestingly fathered the book upon him. In view of the continual joking at the expense of Langham, the second alternative is preferable (300).

In the *Letter*, Langham also claims to be a Mercer and Merchant Adventurer. In this connection, Kuin

points out that a Robert Langham was admitted to the freedom of the Mercers' Company in 1557 after serving an apprenticeship under one William Leonarde (13). Whether this was the same Robert Langham is a moot point, since the Robert Langham of the *Letter* gives his master's name as "Bumstead", not Leonarde. Muriel Bradbrook has noticed this discrepancy:

It seems improbable that the writer is really Robert Langham, admitted to the Mercers' Company in 1557, having been apprenticed to William Leonarde; for at the beginning of the letter he describes how he travelled to France 'under my Master Bumstead'. Christopher Bompstead *could* have been Langham's Master, for he himself was admitted to the Mercers' Company in 1541; but in fact he was not. If there is one thing which even the most careless writer would not mistake, it is the name of the master to whom he had served his seven years of apprenticeship, in whose house he had resided. . . . To choose a name that was nearly, but not quite, that of a well-known citizen was a familiar clown's jest (Scott 300).

At this stage, it is thus not possible to determine with any certainty whether the Robert Langham who was the Keeper of the Council Chamber, and the Robert Langham who was a Mercer after having served an apprenticeship to William Leonarde, were one and the same individual. There may have been one Robert Langham, with successive careers as a Mercer and as a court official, or there may have been two separate Robert Langhams.

Langham's claim to be a Merchant Adventurer is also dubious. His name is not found in the lists of members of the Company in the Patent Rolls of 1555 and 1564 (*CPR 1554-5*, 55-7; *CPR 1563-6*, 178-9). Nor is this particularly surprising, since Langham was a minor court functionary while the Merchant Adventurers, on the other hand, were wealthy men who could loan the Queen £30,000 (*CPR 1560-3*, 330) and who, as their Charter indicates:

at their own adventure and costs provided, rigged and tackled certain ships, pinnaces and other vessels and have advanced them furnished with all things necessary to discover isles and lands unknown (*CPR 1554-5*, 57).

Langham's claim to be an adherent of the Earl of Leicester is supported by sounder evidence. In the

Letter, Langham says:

. . . it pleased hiz honor [Leicester] to beare me goodwill at first, and so to continu. To have given me apparail eeven from hiz bak, to get me alowauns in the stabl, too advauns me unto thiz woorschipfull office so neer the most honorabl Coouncell, too help me in my licenz of Beanz (though indeed I doo not so moch uze it, for I thank God I need not) too permit my good Father to serve the stabl (Kuin 76).

While it is impossible to read this passage without the suspicion that it contains some jests at Langham's expense, its contention that members of the Langham family were connected to the Earl of Leicester is well founded. Elizabeth Jenkins has noticed a payment by Leicester in 1558 to a servant of his named Langham "for two days board wages attending upon my Lady [Amy Dudley] at Christchurch, your Lordship being at Windsor" (40). Similarly, Nichols records that:

In 1574 the Queen granted a Licence to James Burbage, John Perkyuns, John Lanham [Langham], and two others, servants of the Earl of Lycester, to exhibit all kinds of Stage-plays, during pleasure, in any part of England (*Progresses*, 531).

From the foregoing it is clear that Robert Langham and perhaps other members of his family, with their connections to the court, the Earl of Leicester, and the world of drama, would have been known to the Earl of Oxford.

2. Humfrey Martin, the *Letter's* recipient.

Although no records exist of a friendship between the Earl of Oxford and Humfrey Martin, there is the strongest likelihood that the two were acquainted. To establish this, it is necessary to look in some detail at Humfrey Martin's family background.

Humfrey Martin was the eldest son of one of London's leading citizens of the early Elizabethan period. Sir Roger Martin, (the son of Lawrence Martin of Long Melford, Suffolk), was a sheriff, an alderman, Lord Mayor in 1568, a governor of Highgate School, a member of the Mercers' Company, of which he was three times Master (Kuin 13), and a charter member of the Company of Merchant Ad-

venturers (*CPR 1554-5*, 56). He and his family lived in a mansion leased from the Mercers' Company in Soper Lane, a short distance from the mansion of the Earls of Oxford on Walbrook at London Stone. When he died in 1573, Sir Roger was buried at St. Antholin's church in Budge Row near Walbrook (*Remembrancia*, 308).

Sir Roger was twice married. His first wife was Letitia Pakington, daughter of Humfrey Pakington. The Pakington family was a noted one. Humfrey Pakington was a younger brother of the wealthy Sir John Pakington, to whose estate he was part heir. Humphrey's great-nephew Sir John Pakington was appointed a member of the Privy Council in Elizabeth's time, and was a great personal favourite of the Queen's (Burke 1014).

By Letitia Pakington, Sir Roger had two sons, Humfrey and Edmund, and two daughters, Susanna and Martha (Letter of 3rd July, 1989 from Guildhall Library).

Sir Roger's wife Letitia had several sisters. One of these sisters, Jane Pakington, was married firstly, to Humphrey Baskerville, a London alderman and, secondly, to Sir Lionel Duckett, Lord Mayor in 1572 and, along with Leicester, Burghley and others "a munificent subscriber to the expeditions of Martin Frobisher in search of the North-west Passage". Another sister, Anne Pakington, was married to James Bacon, a London alderman who was the brother of the Lord Keeper Sir Nicholas Bacon, and the uncle of Sir Francis Bacon (*Remembrancia*, 37-8).

This latter relationship is of direct interest to the present inquiry since Sir Nicholas Bacon's wife Anne was the sister of Mildred, Lady Burghley, the Earl of Oxford's mother-in-law. Lady Burghley would undoubtedly have been acquainted with her brother-in-law Sir Nicholas's immediate family, and would thus have known the Pakington sisters. These family connections are reinforced by the fact that Lord Burghley was associated with Sir Lionel Duckett as one of the "Governors, Assistants and Commonalty for the Mines Royal" (*CPR 1566-9*, 211). As well,

Lord Burghley, Nicholas Bacon, Roger Martin, Humphrey Baskerville, and Lionel Duckett were all charter members of the Company of Merchant Adventurers (*CPR 1554-5*, 55-6).

Of Humfrey Martin himself, a few personal details survive. He was twenty-three years of age at the time of the heralds' visitation of London in 1568, and was thus five years older than Edward, Earl of Oxford. According to the records of the Mercers' Company, he was admitted to the freedom of the Company by patrimony in 1570. In October, 1571, he was one of a group of young freemen chosen to organise the Company's ceremonial for the Lord Mayor. Humfrey Martin was married on November 11th, 1572 to Alice Pullison, daughter of Thomas Pullison (Letter of 3rd July, 1989 from Guildhall Library). He must have inherited considerable wealth when Sir Roger Martin died in 1573, and seems to have followed in his father's footsteps as a London merchant: in 1574, he, his brother Edmund, and Thomas Pullison suffered losses when a merchant ship of theirs was confiscated at Flushing (*CSP 1547-80*, 490).

There is thus a considerable amount of factual evidence to support the hypothesis that Edward, Earl of Oxford and Humfrey Martin were acquainted. To summarize:

- 1) Humfrey Martin and Oxford were only five years apart in age, and their London mansions were situated on opposite banks of Walbrook.
- 2) They were distantly connected by marriage, in that Humfrey Martin's aunt was married to the brother-in-law of one of Lady Burghley's sisters.
- 3) Oxford's father-in-law, Lord Burghley, had business connections with Humfrey Martin's father and uncles.
- 4) Humfrey Martin was part owner of a merchant vessel as Oxford may have been (see issue #2 of the *Edward de Vere Newsletter*).
- 5) Oxford, and Humfrey Martin's uncle, Sir Lionel Duckett, were both involved in financing the Frobisher expeditions of 1576-78.
- 6) Humfrey Martin obviously had some interest in, and talent for, spectacle and pageantry, as did Ox-

ford.

7) Finally, Humfrey Martin's grandfather, Lawrence Martin, lived in Long Melford, Suffolk, near Lavenham, where the Earls of Oxford had long been lords of the manor (Betterton 3).

3. "my master Bomsted"

If this individual was, as has been suggested, Christofer Bompsted, a Mercer admitted to the freedom of the Company in 1541 (Kuin 13), he would have been known to Lord Burghley and, through Burghley, have perhaps been known to Oxford. That Burghley knew of Bompsted is established by a memorandum of 1561 found in Burghley's papers:

. . . memorial by Chr. Bumpstede to the Queen, [s]hewing the necessity of coining small moneys, and the precedents which there are for the same (*CSP 1547-80*, 190).

4. "Master Alderman Pullison, my good oold freend Master smith Customer, Master thorogood, Master Denman".

Thomas Pullison, sheriff and alderman in 1573 (and, in 1584, Lord Mayor of London) was, as noted above, Humfrey Martin's father-in-law. Oxford would certainly have known him, both because of his role as a public official and because his home was in Budge Row (*Remembrancia*, 284) near the mansion of the Earls of Oxford at London Stone near Walbrook. Similarly, Oxford must have known Thomas Smith, Customer of London, with whom he was to be associated only a few years later in the Fenton voyage (see issue #2 of the *Edward de Vere Newsletter*).

It is more difficult to determine whether Oxford knew Master Thorogood and Master Denman because neither their first names nor any identifying titles are given. It is perhaps of some interest that a Thomas Thorogood was bailiff of the manors of Geddinge and Bass, owned by Lord Burghley (*CPR 1566-69*, 438). It is also interesting that the epithet *Mio fratello in Christo* is used, jestingly, to identify Master Denman in the *Letter* because Queen Elizabeth herself apparently used this epithet to Lord

Burghley, gibing at his Puritan "Brethren in Christ" (Meadows 32).

5. Sir George Howard

The author of the *Letter* claims that in:

afternoons and a nights, sumtime am I with the right woorshipfull Syr George Howard, az good a Gentlman az ony lyvez (Kuin 78).

It is significant that this particular nobleman is singled out for attention in the *Letter*, as he was one of Oxford's kinsman.

Sir George Howard was the brother of Queen Katharine Howard and nephew of Anne Howard, wife of John de Vere, 14th Earl of Oxford (Nichols, *Machyn*, 337, 371). Sir George Howard was also related by marriage to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford: Sir George's cousin Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, had married Oxford's aunt, Frances de Vere (Peck 297).

Sir George was favoured by Queen Elizabeth, who gave him many grants of land and appointed him Master of the Armoury and Gentleman Usher of the Privy Chamber (*CPR 1569-72*, 437). He also appears to have shared the Earl of Oxford's proficiency at jousting. Machyn's diary records a great joust of March 25th, 1555, in which the challengers were a Spaniard and Sir George Howard (Nichols, *Machyn*, 84).

6. William Patten

Although William Patten is not mentioned in the Langham *Letter*, he was involved in its publication, as shown by his letter of September 10th, 1575 to Lord Burghley.

Patten and Burghley appear to have had a very long association. Patten was connected with Burghley in such commercial ventures as the Mineral and Battery Works and the Mines Royal, (*CPR 1566-9*, 211, 274) and used Burghley's notes in writing his *Expedicion into Scotlande* (Beckingsale 27). He may even have lived for a time in the 1560's in Burghley's

household when Oxford was also living there as a ward of the Queen. Because of his long connection with Lord Burghley, William Patten would have been well known to the Earl of Oxford.

It remains to be considered what part Patten played in the publication of the Langham *Letter*.

It has been suggested that he was the *Letter's* author (Scott 301-5). His known interests and personality, however, rule this out. Stow calls the lawyer and antiquary Patten a "learned gentleman and grave citizen" (O'Kill 28), and he was evidently the exact opposite of the lively, high-spirited individual who wrote the Langham *Letter*. Nor does his writing style bear any resemblance to that of the *Letter*. Most importantly, there is his age. Presumably, Patten was a contemporary of Lord Burghley, who was born in 1520. If so, Patten was in his 50's in 1575, and may even have been in his 60's (Kuin 12). It is impossible to reconcile this aging, serious-minded individual with the high-spirited young man of the *Letter* who says that he is:

. . .allweyz among the Gentlwemen. . . and when I see cumpany according, than can I be az lyvely too: sumtime I foot it with daunsyng: noow with my Gyttern, and els with my Cyttern, then at the Virginallz: Ye kno nothing cums amiss to me: then carroll I up a song withall, that by and by they cum flocking about me lyke beez too hunny: and ever they cry, anoother good Langham anoother (Kuin 78).

It is equally impossible to reconcile Patten with the amorous young man of the passage immediately following:

Shall I tell yoo? when I see Misterz — (A, see a mad knave, I had allmost tolld all) that shee gyvez onz but an ey or an ear: why then, man am I blest; my grace, my coorage, my cunning is doobled: She says sumtime she likez it, and then I like it mooch the better, it dooth me good to heer hoow well I can do. And too say the truth: what, with mine eyz, az I can amorously gloit it, with my spanish sospires, my french heighes, mine Italian dulcets, my dutch hovez, my doobl releas, my hy reachez, my fine feyning, my deep diapason, my wanton warblz, my running, my tyming, my tuning and my twynkling, I can gracify the matter az well az the prowdest of them (Kuin 79).

Clearly, Patten did not write the *Letter*, but in his

letter of September 10, 1575 he admits to Burghley that he is responsible for its distribution. It is also worth remarking that he implies that he has a defense for distributing the *Letter*, although he chooses not to raise it ("mooch less to stond at ony poynt of defens"). That defense could well be that he distributed copies of the *Letter* as a favour to Burghley's son-in-law, the Earl of Oxford.

As the foregoing discussion has shown, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, would have known all the individuals mentioned in, or connected with the publication of, the Langham *Letter*. These external circumstances render it highly probable that he was the *Letter's* author.

The final part of this three-part article will deal with the internal evidence in the *Letter* itself which indicates that the author of the Langham *Letter* was, in fact, the Earl of Oxford.

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